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Director

October 25, 2004

Mr. John Troidl,
Executive Director
La Clinica
515 West Court Street
P.O. Box 1323
Pasco, WA 99301

Dear Mr. Troidl,

We are writing today because we have serious concerns with reports we are receiving from Latino community members in the Tri-Cities regarding recent decisions and actions La Clinica has made. As you are aware, the Commission on Hispanic Affairs is tasked by the people of the State of Washington with advising the Governor, the Legislature, as well as state and local agencies on issues of concern to the Latino community. Over the last week, the Commission has received numerous calls from concerned community members, patients of La Clinica, doctors, and other health professionals in the community raising concerns regarding La Clinica's recent decision to fire three doctors that predominately serve a large Latino population.

According to reports made to the Commission, the decision to dismiss three internal medicine doctors that treated high risk and complicated Latino patients has had a large impact to these patients' ability to access the health care they need in the Tri-Cities. These reports include the following concerns:

- Over 60 patients were refused services on October 16, following the dismissal of the three doctors. Patients who went in to see their doctor were told that their appointments would need to be rescheduled or that they needed to transfer to another doctor for their care.
- Because of this recent decision, Latino patients with high-risk conditions (cancer, heart problems, lupus, diabetes, HIV/Aids) will no longer be able to receive specialty care. As an example, over the weekend, a patient with heart problems was unable to receive timely appropriate medical attentions and as a result, the patient passed away. The community feels that recent changes in La Clinica contributed to this unfortunate death.
- Most of these patients are low income or receive Basic Health or Medicaid coverage and most specialists in the Tri-Cities do not see these types of patients.

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Therefore, most of the patients are not able to afford to see specialist that do not have reduced fee programs, or accept Basic Health or Medicaid.

- Patients have raised concerns of feeling helpless – Who will be seeing them? How are they going to get their medication refills? Most specialists are not able to speak Spanish and most of these patients are Spanish speaking. There are concerns of abandonment of care resulting from the recent decisions made by La Clinica administration.
- Patients have voiced their anger with La Clinica administration's decision to change the scope of practice from internal medicine specialty to that of family practice. Due to the nature of their health complications, most of these conditions are beyond the scope of practice for a family practice doctor. Many patients indicate that it was a family practice doctor that referred them to an internal medicine doctor initially.
- There is great disappointment and frustration expressed on how the administration of La Clinica has handled the change in the scope of practice. Patients are being told that the Internal Medicine Department will be closing as of December 31, 2004; however, they are unable to see their internal medicine doctor now. In essence, the Internal Medicine Department was closed October 15th as patients no longer have access to this specialty. There was no time provided for the care of these patients to be transferred to other doctors. Local medical providers have also raised questions about the standard of care La Clinica is providing.
- Community members state that there is a large disconnect between the administration, the board members, and the community. Some community members have indicated that they have attempted to contact board members to raise their concerns and have been informed that board members are forbidden to speak with community members and employees. Community members are requesting the removal of the executive director and the board - noting that "they" don't know the needs of the community and that board members are no longer representing their needs.
- Community members are also requesting that La Clinica provide the community a report of the financial status of the organization. Concerns were raised that administration is misusing funds by providing administrators huge pay raises and then reducing the level of services provided to the community.

The net result of these reports is widespread confusion and a profound sense of helplessness, anger, and distrust among the Latino community toward La Clinica. At this point it is not clear the extend of the impact to the Latino community, but the fact remains that the lives of many high risk Latino patients receiving their care at La Clinica has been affected. Given the impact these decisions have had on the Latino community, we believe that it is critical to address these concerns. The Commission makes the following recommendations:

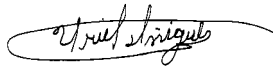
- A meeting should be scheduled between La Clinica leadership and Latino community leaders to discuss the community concerns and La Clinica's response to the concerns. The Commission will be glad to facilitate this meeting.

- La Clinica develop and implement a plan to transition these patients to other doctors to receive the appropriate level of care needed.
- La Clinica re-assess the need for internal medicine care needed by its patient population. We ask La Clinica to consider other options other than completely closing the internal medicine department – downsize the department, look for other efficiencies or reduce the scope of practice within the department.
- If communication is being restricted between community members and the board, we urge La Clinica to allow open communication between the community and the board.

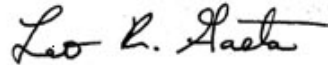
Finally, we understand the importance of an organization like La Clinica to the Latino community. We must inform you that these concerns came to us as a big surprise. La Clinica has a strong history of advocating and serving the healthcare needs of Latinos in the Tri-Cities for over 20 years. We believe that La Clinica has the best interest of the community in mind and intends on resolving these concerns.

We appreciate your time and prompt attention to this important matter and we look forward to working with La Clinica to address and resolve these concerns. We also look forward to receiving your written response. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Uriel Iñiguez,
Executive Director



Leo R. Gaeta
Chair

Cc: Mr. Norm Love, Board President
Mr. Homero Tamez, Tri-Cities Commissioner
Mr. Gabriel Portugal, Tri-Cities Commissioner